



**HAL**  
open science

# Dividing an Apple. The Nutritive Soul and Soul Parts in Alexander of Aphrodisias

Gweltaz Guyomarc'h

► **To cite this version:**

Gweltaz Guyomarc'h. Dividing an Apple. The Nutritive Soul and Soul Parts in Alexander of Aphrodisias. Nutrition and Nutritive Soul in Aristotle and Aristotelianism, De Gruyter, pp.197-220, 2020, 10.1515/9783110690552-012 . hal-04004212

**HAL Id: hal-04004212**

**<https://hal.science/hal-04004212>**

Submitted on 5 Apr 2023

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

## Dividing an apple: the nutritive soul and soul parts in Alexander of Aphrodisias<sup>1</sup>

Gweltaz Guyomarc'h

University of Lyon

### 1. The soul and the apple

Alexander's *De anima* must be distinguished from his lemmatic commentary on the Aristotelian treatise, which is only known to us through testimonies.<sup>2</sup> The *De anima* is described as “personal”<sup>3</sup>, has a polemical aim and targets a wider, less-specialized audience than commentaries typically do. Nonetheless, in many cases, Alexander's *De anima* conforms to the agenda and arrangement of its Aristotelian source. The examination of the nutritive soul is one such case: the discussion offers Alexander the opportunity to introduce methodological distinctions, as Aristotle himself did in *De anima* 2.4. But, whereas Aristotle, at the beginning of *De anima* 2.4, stresses that in order to determine the essence of a soul power, it is required to look into the activity of this power and, ultimately, into its object<sup>4</sup>, Alexander uses an analogy that does not appear in Aristotle's text:

T.1. For we do not divide the soul as though it were composed from the parts into which we divide it as separate things. Rather, we divide the soul by enumerating the powers it has and by ascertaining the differences between them, just as if one were to divide an apple into its fragrance (εἶς τε εὐωδίαν), lustre, shape, and flavour. For dividing an apple in this way is not dividing it as a body (ὡς σώματος), even though the apple is certainly a body, nor as a number. (Alexander, *DA* 31.1-6, transl. Caston slightly modified)

The origin of the analogy between soul and apple is an open question and has been discussed. In the literature, the two likely candidates are either the Stoics or other Peripatetics, like Nicolaus of Damascus.<sup>5</sup> The Stoic origin of the analogy can be traced back to Iamblichus. In a passage of his *De anima*, Iamblichus likens the functions of the leading part of the soul (impression, assent, impulsion and reason) to the sweetness and the aroma of the apple (“τὴν εὐωδίαν”), which both inhere in the same body and differ only

---

<sup>1</sup> First, I am grateful to G. Korobili and R. Lo Presti for their invitation to take part in the conference which led to the publication of this volume, and to all the conference participants from whom I learned greatly. Thanks are also due to V. Caston for communicating to me his unpublished translation of the second part of Alexander's *De anima*, as well as to A. Hangai for sharing with me his excellent dissertation, especially the passages concerning Alexander on the soul. Finally, I am very grateful to Jeanne Allard for her translation and our discussions about it.

<sup>2</sup> For a reconstruction of this commentary, see Kupreeva (2012).

<sup>3</sup> For problems arising from the designation “personal” and from the distinction between personal treatises and commentaries, see Rashed (2007), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *DA* 2.4, 415a14-23.

<sup>5</sup> Caston (2012), 126, following Inwood (1985), 30-32.

in quality.<sup>6</sup> In the Stoic view, the functions of the leading part of the soul are corporeal insofar as they are qualities, but they are not separated in place. If Alexander had something like the Stoic view in mind, *i.e.* if the passage T.1 had a polemical aim<sup>7</sup>, one must admit that his refutation would remain entirely implicit and, even, that it would miss its intended target. For, precisely because of what is commonly called their “monopsychism”, the Stoics (or most of them) *do not* divide the leading part of the soul as they would apple wedges.

In fact, it was common in Alexander’s time to use the apple and its qualities as an *analogon*. One occurrence is found in a text by the Pseudo-Galen on the incorporeality of qualities, and many others in Sextus Empiricus, where they refer to cases where one object appears in various ways to the senses.<sup>8</sup> Alexander also uses it in this latter sense.<sup>9</sup> The apple and its qualities are a model, either of accidents inhering in a subject<sup>10</sup>, or of mereological relations. As a result, the meaning of the analogy in Alexander becomes clearer. There is an implicit premiss: that the most usual way to divide an apple is to cut it into wedges. But soul parts are not apple wedges. They are rather analogous to its “fragrance, lustre, shape, and flavour”. Since these sensible qualities are coextensive with the entire apple, they cannot be divided spatially. This is also how the analogy was read by Themistius and Pseudo-Philoponus (both of whom may have come into contact with this specific use of the analogy in Alexander’s *De anima* or in his lemmatic commentary).<sup>11</sup> Pseudo-Philoponus, in particular, explicates the idea underlying the analogy: “this is how a power differs from a part, that a power, as we said, runs through the whole substance (δι’ ὅλης τῆς οὐσίας κειρώρηκε), whereas a part is not in the whole substance but in something of it.”<sup>12</sup>

Not only are soul parts not divided locally – they are not divided numerically either, Alexander adds. But this comes as a surprise: in the passage quoted above, Alexander maintained that, in order to divide the soul, one must first “enumerate” its powers (“καταριθμήσει”, 31.2-3). In this case, however, as V. Caston notes, Alexander is most likely arguing against those who conceive the soul as an aggregate of discrete parts.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Alexander sometimes combines the spatial and numerical divisions or even conflates one with the other, with the thought that any particular thing occupies a determined place.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Iamblichus, *De anima*, apud Stobaeus 1.368, 12-20 (SVF 2.826; LS 53K).

<sup>7</sup> As V. Caston (2012), 126 claims.

<sup>8</sup> Ps-Galen, *Quod qualitates incorporea sint*, 469.15-472.2 Kühn (see Alexander, *Mantissa* §6, 123.23-34); Sextus Empiricus, *PH* 1.94-97; I.99; *AM* VII.103.

<sup>9</sup> *In De sensu*, 165.26-166.2. On this, see Diogenes Laertius, IX.81. Concerning the apple argument in the Sceptics, cf. Annas and Barnes (1985), 71-74.

<sup>10</sup> The apple analogy will be used in this way in Neoplatonic commentaries on the *Categories*.

<sup>11</sup> Themistius, *In DA* 37.21-23 (concerning *DA* 1.5, 41b6-19) and 117.3-4 (about 3.9, 432a22-30); [Philoponus], *In DA* 571.11-13 (also about *DA* 3.9).

<sup>12</sup> [Philoponus], *In DA* 571.14-16, transl. Charlton.

<sup>13</sup> Caston (2012), 125.

<sup>14</sup> In the passage immediately prior to T.1, Alexander uses number as a counter-example to the thesis that all which possesses parts is a magnitude (30.26-29). Our T.1 then aims to say that the soul, even though it possesses parts, is not a magnitude or a body, but also that it cannot be like a number. See also *Quaestio* 3.9, which is all the more important since it comments on *DA* 3.2, 427a9-14. For the division “τόπω δὲ καὶ ἀριθμῶ”, see 94.15 or 95.31. 95.31 is interesting: the phrase “τουτέστιν τῷ ὑποκειμένῳ” is explanatory of local and numerical indivisibility. Likewise, in his own *De anima*, Alexander rarely talks of a “τόπω” division of the parts of the soul and instead uses phrases like “κατὰ τὸ ὑποκείμενον” (*e.g.* 75.8; 99.9). For a contrasting passage, see 94.9-10.

In what follows, I would like to examine the unity of the powers of the soul, focusing especially on the case of the vegetative soul. If the division of soul parts and soul powers is neither local, nor numerical, what is it? In Aristotle's account, the other option is a "logical" division (λόγῳ<sup>15</sup>). But what does that mean? Aristotle himself raises this important question when he lists the aporias of a science of the soul in *De anima* 1.1, then again in 2.2 when he asks whether the nutritive, sensitive and cognitive powers are a soul of their own or a part of a soul.<sup>16</sup>

For Alexander, as we have mentioned, the apple *analogon* appears in the discussion of the vegetative soul. The vegetative soul is in fact a unique case study and may help us answer our question: 1) it can be a part of the soul in animals; 2) the vegetative part of the soul contains many powers; 3) in plants, it can be a soul of its own. It is the only soul power, Aristotle says, which can be "separated". In Alexander's terminology, it is the only soul power which can "subsist apart" from the other powers ("χωρὶς τούτων ὑφίσταται").<sup>17</sup>

Yet, when he begins to discuss the composition of the vegetative soul, Alexander claims:

T.2. The first [power] of the soul, then, in animate things which are subject to coming-to-be and perishing is the [power] for nourishing [oneself], to which the [powers] for growing and for reproducing are both linked (συνέζευκται). (*DA* 29.1-3, transl. Caston)

The key issue in this passage is the meaning of the verb συζεύγνυμι (yoke together, couple). According to Accattino and Donini, the verb indicates that there is only a difference in perspective between the powers of nourishment, growth and reproduction, such that the three powers of the vegetative soul are really identical, and are one sole soul, one sole power. In this view, the three powers are not really different, but are merely different accounts of the same phenomenon.<sup>18</sup> In T.2, "συνέζευκται" does not simply mean that the three powers are connected, but that they are, *stricto sensu*, united.<sup>19</sup>

Against this, I will put forward three correlated hypotheses: 1) Even if there is no lexical distinction in Alexander between "powers of the soul" and "parts of the soul", Alexander nonetheless comes up with criteria which distinguish a soul power from a soul part, or from a soul of its own. The difference between his position and Aristotle's<sup>20</sup> is found chiefly in Alexander's effort to clarify these criteria. 2) As will become clear in the case of the vegetative soul, even the powers that do constitute a soul or a soul part (vegetative/animal/human) are objectively distinct (in a sense that remains to be clarified) and are not

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *DA* 2.2, 413b15. In Alexander, see especially 94.9-10, where the question discussed is whether the entire soul can be found in a substrate that is numerically one, having differences only "according to its powers and its definition" (κατὰ τὰς δυνάμεις μόνον καὶ κατὰ τὸν λόγον ἔχουσα τὰς διαφοράς), or if these powers are separated according to place. This same disjunct is also, expectedly, found in *Quaestio* 2.27, commenting on *DA* 2.2, 413a20 and explicitly referencing 413b15.

<sup>16</sup> Respectively at *DA* 1.1, 402b1-3 and 2.2, 413b10-15.

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle, *DA* 2.2, 413a31-32; Alexander, *DA* 29.13 and *Quaestio* 2.27, 77.12. See also Gregorić (2007), 22.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander, they say, "does not consider as really distinct faculties the powers for nourishing oneself, for growing and for reproducing. Rather, he sees them as various explanations of one and the same fundamental *prôtê dynamis* or *psuchê*." Accattino and Donini (1996), 155-156 (my translation).

<sup>19</sup> Accattino and Donini ascribe to Alexander the standard view of the unity of the soul and of its divisibility in parts. This view is spelled out in Corcilius and Gregorić (2010), 82-83, *esp.* 82: "the capacities are merely logical parts or aspects of the soul, which does not imply that they can be detached from the whole so as to exist separately from one another or from the whole".

<sup>20</sup> At least in the reading of Aristotle by Corcilius and Gregorić (2010). See also Menn (2002).

simply the result of a change in perspective. 3) The main criterion by which one can account for the organization and the unification of soul parts is the teleological criterion.

At this point, for clarificatory purposes, two issues must be distinguished<sup>21</sup>: the internal organization of a soul part, on the one hand; and the unity of the different soul parts in the complex cases of animals and in the yet more complex cases of human beings, on the other hand. In this paper, I will focus on the first issue, but the two are intimately connected. This is already true in Aristotle, and it is still the case in Alexander. As we will see below, the impossibility for a given power to meet the criteria that characterize a genuine soul part gives us clues about the internal unity of a given soul. In other words, the reason why the reproductive power, for instance, is not a genuine soul part is grasped together with the correlate reason, *i.e.* the reason why the vegetative soul can unify the powers of nutrition, growth and reproduction.

## 2. The nutritive soul as a complex form

On the face of it, Accattino and Donini's unitarian interpretation seems able to federate other passages. An instance of this would be the passage where Alexander introduces the nutritive soul, one page after T.2. Alexander has shown that the soul is a condition of life and that the plants must also be endowed with a soul (more on this below). This soul must account for nutrition and growth, as well as for reproduction. Alexander adds:

T.3. Given, then, that the power for nourishing [oneself] is both a soul and first among the soul's powers, we should speak about it first and show just what its essence and nature is. The account of the soul for reproducing is linked (συνέζευκται) to the account (λόγω) of the soul for nourishing [oneself]. For just as being nourished and growing are activities that belong properly (οικεῖα ἔργα) to the soul for nourishing [oneself], so too does reproducing something similar to what sows seed. (Alexander, *DA* 32.6-11, transl. Caston)

The meaning of "λόγω", however, is problematic.<sup>22</sup> It can refer both to the formula of the powers of the nutritive soul, and to the discourse about them. Furthermore, the meaning of "λόγω" will impact the meaning of "συνέζευκται" in the same passage. Should one say that the formulas of the powers of nutrition, growth and reproduction are united, or that, in the inquiry on the soul, the discourses on these three powers are intertwined? The first option would result in an attenuation of the logical difference between the three powers. We can reject it, if we consider that Alexander's T.3 is a reading of Aristotle's *De anima* 2.4:

T.3'. Since the same capacity of soul is both nutritive and generative, it is necessary to determine what concerns nutrition first; for it is in virtue of this function that it is marked off (ἀφορίζεται) from the other capacities. (Aristotle, *DA* 2.4, 416a18-21, transl. Shields)

In chapter 2.4, T.3' comes after a general introduction on the method of inquiry suited for soul powers (415a14-23). This introduction is followed by a broad account of the nutritive soul (a23-b7) and a general discussion of causality in the soul (b7-28), at the end of which the claim that nourishment and growth do belong to life can be stated (b27-28), this claim implying that nourishment and growth require the possession of a soul. Aristotle then refutes Empedocles and other philosophers (perhaps Heraclitus) who

<sup>21</sup> They are carefully distinguished in Johansen (2012), 47-48 and (2014), 40.

<sup>22</sup> In his translation, Caston neutrally chooses "account" which suits both meanings. Accattino and Donini ("*discorso*") and Bergeron and Dufour ("*exposé*") choose the second meaning, which seems preferable to me.

have attempted to explain nourishment and growth with no psychic principle (415b28-416a18). Our T.3' passage justifies the necessity to start with nourishment and, in so doing, inaugurates a positive treatment of the nutritive soul.<sup>23</sup> If T.3' is indeed the Aristotelian passage that Alexander has in mind, then “λόγω” at T.3 refers to the discourse.<sup>24</sup>

But, concerning the nutritive soul, T.3' can be used to defend both a strong and a weak reading. In the strong reading, as C. Shields says, nutrition and reproduction are “twin aspects of the same overarching function”.<sup>25</sup> This reading, however, encounters a problem further in 2.4, where Aristotle points out, contrarily to what the strong reading maintains, that growth and reproduction do not operate in the same way on food.<sup>26</sup> This ambiguity explains why Alexander never goes so far as to describe the three powers of the nutritive soul as identical. On the contrary, the use of “συνέζευκται” in T.2 signals the intention to articulate the three powers without reuniting them into one power. Whereas Aristotle is ambiguous when he says that “the same capacity of soul is both nutritive and generative”, Alexander only maintains that the actions to nourish oneself, grow and reproduce are the proper activities (οἰκεῖα ἔργα) of the nutritive soul.

The endeavor to articulate rather than to identify the three powers is not only the result of Aristotelian exegesis in Alexander – its aim is also polemical. In the *De anima* as in the *Mantissa*, Alexander targets the Stoic doctrine according to which the powers of nutrition and growth are distinct from the power of reproduction. It is based on this distinction that the Stoics deny to plants the possession of a soul, and confine them to the φύσις.<sup>27</sup> Against this view, Alexander strives to show that being alive necessarily requires the possession of a soul. If plants are alive, they are ensouled and, therefore (skipping some premises), the “first power”, *i.e.* the nutritive one (nutritive being taken here in its broader sense of vegetative) is “psychic” (ψυχική).<sup>28</sup> As he often does, Alexander retrieves the Aristotelian critique of the *physikoi* and uses it against the Stoics.

However, Alexander's argument against the Stoics would be much more significant if it involved the unification of the three powers of the vegetative soul into one sole power, *i.e.* if Alexander had offered a strictly unitarian account of the vegetative soul. But Alexander never goes that far.

---

<sup>23</sup> The word “τροφή” can mean the food one feeds on, as well as the activity of nourishment itself. Even if, in the next clause (416a21-22), τροφή can mean food, it seems better to understand it as the activity of nourishment based on the “τῷ ἔργῳ τούτῳ” (a21). On this, see Polansky (2007), 213-214 (who nonetheless chooses food to translate τροφή in both clauses, unlike C. Shields) and Johansen (2012), 106-107.

<sup>24</sup> The rest of Alexander's text after T.3. also supports this reading. Following T.3, after a sentence in which Alexander justifies the inclusion of reproduction in the nutritive soul (32.11-23), the text returns to its main line of argument with the methodological “Object – Activity – Power” rule, which is said to guide the inquiry (“ἐπὶ τῶν προκειμένων οὕτω χρῆ ποιεῖν”, 32.24). This also encourages us to read “λόγω” at T.3 as referring to the discourse.

<sup>25</sup> Shields (2016), 201, about *GA* 2.5.

<sup>26</sup> *DA* 2.4, 416b11-20. See also Johansen (2012), 107-108.

<sup>27</sup> At least according to Crysippus (but not Panaetius), *cf.* Inwood (1985), 35 and Tieleman (1996), 97-99.

<sup>28</sup> See, mainly, *DA* 31.25-32.19 and *Mantissa* §4, 118.16-26. V. Caston has argued that Alexander could not be targeting the Stoics in the *DA* passage: if that were the case, Alexander's refutation “would misfire”, because the Stoic argument would not be impacted by the objection that simple bodies are not alive (*DA* 31.27-28; Caston (2012), 126). Indeed, for the Stoics, simple bodies are not part of “nature” in the strict sense. Rather, the divine *pneuma* creates cohesion, ἔξις, in them. But, if we look at other texts in which the Stoic target is undeniable (most notably *Mantissa* §4), we can see that Alexander does not target the tripartition ἔξις / φύσις / ψυχή, but rather that he reduces it to the couple φύσις / ψυχή, since he is most concerned with the distinction between animate and inanimate beings.

The reason why Alexander never goes so far as to identify the three powers of the nutritive soul is to be found in his own interpretation of the Aristotelian doctrine. Alexander's *De anima* begins with a general picture of the sublunary substances, which starts from the elements and leads to the souls.<sup>29</sup> Doing so, his aim is to establish that this *scala naturae* is also a *scala formarum*, since Alexander extends and systematizes the hylomorphic model, so that it applies to every sublunary substance, including the elements.<sup>30</sup> He can then make use of arguments from analogy or *a fortiori* like: if x is the case for the forms of elements, x will also be the case for the soul.<sup>31</sup> There is more to these arguments, of course, than an analogy, since the gradation of forms is also a description of the living body from basic components to soul, which is a “form of forms and a kind of culmination of culminations”.<sup>32</sup>

Now, Alexander must also distinguish the degrees of this scale of forms. To introduce these distinctions, he uses the criterion of the plurality of powers. In simple bodies, form is a unique power emerging from a pair of properties. For instance, in the case of fire, lightness emerges from the dry – hot pair.<sup>33</sup> But, unlike the simple matter of simple bodies, the matter underlying living bodies, Alexander says, is “a compound body with distinctive parts useful for different activities”.<sup>34</sup> This is why Alexander interprets the “ὀργανικόν” of Aristotle's famous sketch of a definition of soul in *DA* 2.2 to refer to the material condition of life. The word qualifies a body “that has many different parts able to subserve the soul powers”.<sup>35</sup>

In other words, life is complex. The material complexity of bodies will be matched by the complexity of powers. Alexander opposes the simple motion of simple bodies to trees and plants, which possess the principle of nutrition, growth and reproduction.<sup>36</sup> Numerous texts confirm this proportional relation (“ἀναλογία”) between the complexity of bodies and the plurality of powers possessed by the psychic form.<sup>37</sup> As was shown by M. Rashed, a passage of *Generation of Animals* 2.3 can be used as ground for Alexander's claim. In this passage, Aristotle draws an explicit analogy between the differences in dignity and indignity among souls and the corporeal nature that underlies these souls.<sup>38</sup> In Alexander, this claim will develop as a cosmological one, since the works of the “divine power” are proportionate to the matter on which this

<sup>29</sup> *DA* 2.25-15.29 (and more specifically 7.14-10.10).

<sup>30</sup> Accattino (1995), 186-187; Guyomarc'h (2015), 246-248.

<sup>31</sup> For instance, *DA* 11.6-7. See also *DA* 5.12-18 et 21.24-22.23.

<sup>32</sup> *DA* 8.12-13: “εἶδος (...) εἰδῶν καὶ τελειότης τις τελειότητων”.

<sup>33</sup> *DA* 5.4-6: “In the case of fire, which is a simple, natural body, heat and dryness, as well as the lightness that emerges from them and above them (ἡ ἐκ τούτων τε καὶ ἐπὶ τούτοις γεννωμένη κοφότης), are its form”. On this difficult text, see Accattino (1995), 186-189 and Caston (2012), 79. The difficulty does not dissipate in what follows, where it is said simultaneously both that lightness is what *proceeds from* the form of the fire (“παρὰ τῆς φύσεως καὶ τῆς κατὰ τὸ εἶδος οὐσίας”, 5.10) and that lightness *is* the form of fire (“ἡ τις κοφότης εἶδος τε καὶ φύσις οὐσα τοῦ πυρός”, 5.11-12). More work remains to be done in this matter. I am of the opinion that Alexander brings together two claims: 1) elements have a unique power (*i.e.* a principle for only one type of motion); 2) the form of the elements is a combination of differences (see Alexander *apud* Simplicius, *In Phys.* 282.21-24, and Alexander, *DA* 8.17-22; *Quaestio* 3.14; *Mantissa* §3, 115.24-25).

<sup>34</sup> *DA* 10.28-29.

<sup>35</sup> *DA* 16.11-12; see also 75.26-30.

<sup>36</sup> *DA* 8.25-9.4.

<sup>37</sup> *DA* 11.5-13; *De providentia* 83.6-87.4 (Ruland), etc.

<sup>38</sup> *GA* 2.3, 736b29-33; Rashed (2007), 156-157 and 286-291.

power acts.<sup>39</sup> These cosmological elements are not explicitly involved in the *De anima*, but the result of Alexander's analogy is – namely a strong pressure to grant living beings a plurality of powers<sup>40</sup>, which cannot be only apparent.

In a nutshell, there is a hierarchy to Alexander's polemical aims. Against the Stoics, it is crucial to unify the powers of growth and nutrition with the power of reproduction, and to make them all soul powers. But what matters most is to counteract Stoic monopyschism: if not, the organizational criterion of the Peripatetic *scala naturae* itself falls apart. This is why the differences between the psychic powers must be exacerbated as much as feasible, while avoiding the local separation endorsed by the Platonists and renewed by Galen.<sup>41</sup> Hence, Alexander states clearly that the soul powers are multiple and different, and that it is not “just one power which seems to be several” (*DA* 27.5). He can even enjoy his mediate position and use Platonist (or Platonist-like) arguments (*e.g.* moral conflicts) against the Stoics' monopyschism. This must at least mean that the plurality of the soul powers cannot be only apparent, and that the difference  $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omega$  between the three powers of the vegetative soul cannot be only a difference in perspective.

### 3. The distinguishing criterion for powers

To the question that asks what differentiates the vegetative powers, a first answer is found in the general rule according to which a power (that is, an irrational power<sup>42</sup>) can only have one type of corresponding activity. The rule is set down in *Metaphysics*  $\Theta$  and comes from Plato. It has been given many names: power monovalence or “one-capacity one-function thesis”.<sup>43</sup> This kind of rule acts as a premiss in the argument sketched by Alexander in chapter 4 of the *Mantissa*:

T.4. Rather, the capacities of the soul themselves differ from one another, and it is not possible [to do different things] with the same capacity, for example to think with the [capacity] of sense-perception or to perceive by sense with the [capacity] of thinking. For if the vegetative [part] too belongs to soul, and it is impossible to act in several ways simultaneously with the same capacity, and the nutritive [part] is always active in living things, then either we will perform no other activity in respect of our soul, if the capacity of the soul is single, or else, if we do perform other activities, for example perceiving and feeding at the same [time], then the capacity of the soul is not single... (Alexander, *Mantissa* §4 [viii-ix], 118.28-35, transl. Sharples)

This passage is inserted in a series of arguments aimed at Stoic monopyschism. The monovalence of power here may look less finely-grained than its Aristotelian version at  $\Theta$  2, 1046a36-b29.<sup>44</sup> Alexander treats a rational power (the intellect) like irrational powers: all are specified by *one* proper activity. What

<sup>39</sup> See chiefly *Quaestio* 2.3; *De providentia* 77.12 (Ruland).

<sup>40</sup> Confirmed in Simplicius, *In Phys.* 265.1-3.

<sup>41</sup> *DA* 27.4-8: “To show that the soul has several powers and not just one power which seems to be several – as Democritus and various others thought, because of the changes and activities [it undergoes] at different times, in relation to different things, and by different means – it is sufficient to point to the conflict of powers with one another, which occurs both in people who control themselves and in those who do not.” (transl. Caston) Concerning the reference to Democritus: see the discussion between Accattino and Donini (1996), 152 and Caston (2012), 118, to determine whether Democritus is merely, as Caston maintains, “a beard for the Stoics”, or if the ascription of this view to Democritus can be substantiated.

<sup>42</sup> See D. Lefebvre's interrogations about rational powers in Lefebvre (2003).

<sup>43</sup> Lefebvre (2003). Cf. also Hintikka (1974), 8.

<sup>44</sup> The following passage (§4, 118.35-38), about the division of the arts according to their proper power, confirms that Alexander is indeed thinking of  $\Theta$  2 here.



Alexander adds is a temporal criterion (“ἄμα”), which is relevant in this particular case, because nutrition is a condition of life and that it must thus be active until the animal’s death. Having stated this set of premises (the vegetative power’s psychic character, the monovalence of powers and the temporal criterion), Alexander moves to the following dilemma: either all ensouled beings are plants, since only the vegetative power would be constantly active in them; or there would be many powers of the soul, at least in animals. But the monovalence premiss could still seem to beg the question here.<sup>45</sup> At the very least, this premiss states as *fact* the difference between powers. But Alexander has still not definitely explained what makes an activity singular in such a way that it could not be produced by a different power.

The *De anima* elaborates on this topic. Alexander’s explanation, in agreement with Θ 8, is that powers are specified by their ends. This is what we learn from the distinction of powers within the vegetative soul:

T.5. To grow and to be nourished are not the same, however<sup>46</sup>: they do not occur at the same times, nor does each of them have the same function (σκοπός). (1) For an animal is always being nourished for as long as it exists – it is for just this reason the most continuous of soul activities. But things which are nourished are not always growing, since they are nourished as long as they exist, but some also shrink as they age. (2) The function (σκοπός) of what nourishes is to preserve (σωτηρία) what is nourished, but [the function] of what causes growth is to add to the magnitude of what is nourished. So among powers there is accordingly one that is able to preserve (τηρητική) the being and essence [of a living thing] – since the power for nourishing [oneself] is of this kind – while the [power] for growing is primarily able to produce an increase in size. (*DA* 35.9-17, transl. Caston)

Shortly before this passage, Alexander has restated his methodological rule “Object – Activity – Power”. After a discussion of the objects of the different powers of the vegetative soul, what is now at stake is to distinguish these powers according to their activities. To accomplish this, first, there is the temporal criterion<sup>47</sup> (1) which is of use here because of the functional independence it implies. Even if nutrition and growth are conjoined as soul parts, they are disjoined in time, and therefore functionally distinct. But this temporal criterion is only the sign or the result of a more intrinsic difference. The monovalence criterion is then introduced and explicated: the definition – and thus the specificity – of a power depends on the σκοπός it aims for (2). For instance, the function of the nutritive power is to “preserve the being and essence”. The words used here, “τοῦ εἶναί τε καὶ τῆς οὐσίας (...) τηρητική”, or “σωτηρία”, have an ontological echo. The same words are used by Alexander in other texts to qualify the function of a form in general, when it is taken as the “completive part” (συμπληρωτικόν μέρος) of the compound.<sup>48</sup> It is because the nutritive power has for an end to ensure the conservation of an animal’s being that it must last for as long as the animal lives: the temporal criterion is indeed derived from the σκοπός criterion.

---

<sup>45</sup> In the sense that the monovalence argument *immediately* implies a plurality of powers of the soul, which is the view the argument defends. Alexander’s argument seems to target Stoic monopsychism more directly in the negative sentence: “it is not possible [to do different things] with the same capacity”. However, this reading requires that we understand Stoic monopsychism as a stronger doctrine, asserting not only the lack of partition in the soul, but also the identity and unity of its powers (*e.g.*, impression, assent, impulse), which is doxographically debatable. For the Stoic notion of “powers of the soul”, see the passage of Iamblichus *apud* Stobaeus, SVF 2.826, mentioned above, which also (and perhaps more faithfully) calls the powers “qualities”. Cf. Inwood (2014). It goes without saying that this case concerns mainly the soul as a *hegemonikon*, following the distinction recounted by Sextus, *AM* VII.234.

<sup>46</sup> See Aristotle, *DA* 2.4, 416b11-12.

<sup>47</sup> See already in Aristotle, *GC* 1.5, 322a24-26.

<sup>48</sup> Rashed (2007), 158-159.

The question is now: can we identify a more fundamental criterion, for instance a distinction between objects? This would follow from the “Object – Activity – Power” rule. Yet, it is the opposite that is true: the specification of powers according to their objects is also – like the distinction of powers according to their activities – derived from the teleological criterion.

If the specification of vegetative powers was done according to their objects, we would have for each power a certain state of food. For instance, to food that is not yet transformed and contrary to what is being nourished would correspond the nutritive power in its strictest sense; to food that is transformed and assimilable to what is being nourished would correspond the power of growth; finally, the useful residue of digested food would be used for reproduction since, as Alexander explicitly says (following Aristotle), the generative power “uses nourishment itself in a way too”.<sup>49</sup>

This reading is attractive, but it must be rejected. A first clue in this sense is the fate of the “Object – Activity – Power” rule in Alexander’s *De anima*. While Aristotle introduces the rule at the beginning of 2.4, Alexander does so only at *DA* 32.23-33.10 – it appears as a simple transitional passage in the middle of the study of the vegetative soul. Alexander again construes Aristotle’s “logical” priority (κατὰ τὸν λόγον)<sup>50</sup> as applicable only to the “order of inquiry” (33.8). The sequence “Object – Activity – Power” is only valid regarding our knowledge, setting the inquiry to start with what is more known by us. For the order of being, however, it is the opposite: in fact, the power of nutrition “does not require its activity in order to be (πρὸς τὸ εἶναι)” (33.1-2). Alexander’s interpretation does not follow the ontological claim of *Metaphysics* Θ concerning the priority of activity.<sup>51</sup> With this context as background, we can better understand the explicit claim in the *Mantissa*, that the objective criteria cannot differentiate the powers. This claim appears just before our T.4: “the differentiae of the soul are not [a matter of] the things concerning which soul is active; rather, the capacities of the soul *themselves* differ from one another...”<sup>52</sup>.

This intrinsic differentiation of the powers of the soul is confirmed in the case of the vegetative soul. It would be a mistake to maintain that the nutritive power would have as an object food not yet transformed, while the power of growth would have as an object assimilable food. Both these powers have as their object food in both these states. Alexander clearly says that nutrition consists in the assimilation of food, *i.e.* that it consists in the passage from food that is contrary to what is nourished to food that is similar to what is being nourished, that passage being identical with the process of digestion.<sup>53</sup> In the *De mixtione*<sup>54</sup>, Alexander says that the *same* food can result in nourishment and in growth, depending on the amount of it absorbed into the “flux” (the continuous movement of dissociation and adjunction that affects the flesh throughout its life).<sup>55</sup> If, Alexander explains, food is inferior or equal in amount to the matter absorbed into the flux, it is only source of nourishment in the strict sense. But if its amount is greater than

---

<sup>49</sup> *DA* 36.3.

<sup>50</sup> *DA* 2.4, 415a19-20.

<sup>51</sup> Contrarily to what M. Bergeron and R. Dufour maintain in Bergeron and Dufour (2008), 267.

<sup>52</sup> *Mantissa* §4, 118.27-29, transl. Sharples: “ὅτι οὐκ εἰσὶν αἱ ψυχικαὶ διαφοραὶ, περὶ ἃ τῆ ψυχῆ ἡ ἐνέργεια, ἀλλ’ ὅτι αὐταὶ αἱ δυνάμεις τῆς ψυχῆς διαφέρουσιν ἀλλήλων”. See also *DA* 27.8-15.

<sup>53</sup> See *DA* 34.27-35.2 and 35.8, noting the importance of the καί.

<sup>54</sup> *De mixtione* XVI, 236.18-26 Bruns; 43.12-23 Groisard.

<sup>55</sup> For this definition of the flux, cf. *De mixtione* 235.22 Bruns; 41.21-22 Groisard.

the amount of matter, it will also be source of growth.<sup>56</sup> This difference in quantity, however, contains in fact an ontological difference – here, Alexander is thinking of *Generation and Corruption* 1.5, where Aristotle says that the food which nourishes and the food which fuels growth are indeed the same thing, but differ in being (1.5, 322a24-26). Following Aristotle, Alexander indicates this difference in being using the *qua*-operator: “Nutriment, then, only preserves the substrate when it acts *qua* nutriment (καθὸ τροφή), but when it also acts as quantity (ὡς ποσὴ) it contributes to growth as well as preservation”<sup>57</sup>.

It is then not food in itself, unqualifiedly, which is the object of a given power. The distinction between the power of nourishment and the power of growth is not found in their object *simpliciter*, nor even in a given state of that object, but in what medieval philosophers would later call a formal object (distinct from a material object, *i.e.* an extensional object). This formal object is the one that is considered *qua* x or y, in its relation with a given power of the soul.<sup>58</sup> This is why, until I become fully grown, the *bœuf bourguignon* I have for lunch can be *simultaneously* a source of nutrition and a source of growth. This relation between object and power is qualified following the end of that power: in the case of nutrition, food as such aims to “contribute to being as well as preservation of what is nourished”<sup>59</sup>, a wording which Alexander also uses in his own *De anima*.<sup>60</sup>

In other words, the σκοπός of a power is what constitutes, in the strongest sense of the word, the object of that power. The σκοπός transforms an object *simpliciter* (food as an extensional entity) into a formal and relational object (food *qua*...). This teleological differentiation also involves corporeal operations that are partially distinct (*e.g.* following a proportional quantity of food) and ontologically independent (T.5). As will be shown in more detail below, the objective criterion is ambiguous. When it concerns the extensional object, Alexander uses it to highlight the unity of the three vegetative powers.<sup>61</sup> But when it concerns the *qua*-object, the criterion indicates the difference of the same three powers. In both cases, however, the objective criterion is derived from the teleological criterion.

In any case, it seems irrevocably impossible to maintain that nutrition, growth and reproduction would be mere perspectives on a reality which is essentially one. There is a real difference (but not in place) between the three powers of the vegetative soul, and this difference is teleological.

Yet, even if the soul is a cluster of powers distinct in reality, its unity must not be compromised. Alexander repeats more than once that it is impossible for a living being to have many souls.<sup>62</sup> Since this claim concerns animals, it is legitimate to maintain that the unity of the soul must be even stronger in plants, which have less powers. On the other hand, in human beings, Alexander says, the inferior powers

---

<sup>56</sup> As J. Groisard aptly notes, this idea is already found in Plato, *Timaeus* 81b.

<sup>57</sup> *De mixtione* XVI, 236.24-26 Bruns; 43.21-23 Groisard, transl. Todd.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Rashed (2005), cxv.

<sup>59</sup> *De mixtione* 236.23-24 Bruns; 43-19-20 Groisard: “εἰς τὸ εἶναι τε καὶ σώζεσθαι συντελοῦσης τῆ τροφόμενῳ”.

<sup>60</sup> See T.5 above and 35.26-36.2.

<sup>61</sup> It should be noted that the study of food in the *De anima* is focused on the unity of the powers of nutrition and growth (33.12-34.26), but that, when Alexander wants to differentiate these powers, he uses the criterion of activity and aim (as in T.5), and does not detail the role of food “*qua*”. This is perhaps because the distinction is rather technical, which might conflict with the interests of the broader audience this treatise is intended for.

<sup>62</sup> *E.g.* *DA* 30.2-3; 96.12; 99.10, etc.

are “expanded and developed” by the presence of the superior powers.<sup>63</sup> When Alexander sketches a general and typical definition of the soul at the beginning of the treatise, he calls it a “form of forms and a kind of culmination of culminations”, a common form which stands above the different forms of organic bodies.<sup>64</sup> The question is ultimately to know whether these phrases must be taken literally: is the soul a principle of unity, distinct from its different parts or powers, or is it the unity itself of these powers?

#### 4. The unity of the vegetative soul

What produces the unity of the vegetative soul’s powers? According to the text, they are conjoined, “συνέζευκται”, which means that they must have a symmetrical relation: what has one of the three powers has the two others as well. From the start, it seems then excluded that the soul powers form a serial unity.<sup>65</sup> Of course, Alexander sometimes uses the verb συζεύγνυμι about things that have an asymmetrical relation.<sup>66</sup> And, of course, the reproductive power develops last and is a “perfection” of the two previous ones.<sup>67</sup> This is why the entire vegetative soul can be named reproductive, since it is according to their end (τέλος) that things are named.<sup>68</sup>

Yet, relying on Alexander’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, we can specify the conditions which must be met by a group of realities for a serial unity (ἐφεξῆς) to justifiably connect them. Elements in a group have a serial unity if 1) there is an asymmetrical dependency between them, in such a way that the prior element can obtain without the posterior element, but not conversely; 2) the order of the asymmetrical dependency is one of ascending perfection. Concerning things that stand in a serial unity, Alexander says, “the posterior things are more perfect whereas, in the case of things said with reference to one thing, the unity to which the other things are referred [is more perfect].”<sup>69</sup> This ascending perfection is due to the fact that the prior element “contributes” (συντελεῖν) to the posterior element, so that the order is not only hierarchical but also teleological, the inferior terms being for the sake of the superior terms.<sup>70</sup>

This second condition is explicitly applied to the animal or the human soul in the *De anima*, and with the same wording as we find in the commentary on the *Metaphysics*:

T.6. In those things in which the powers of the soul are all present, they are related to each other in such a way that the earlier powers are for the sake of the later ones and make a contribution (συντελεῖν τι) to them, analogous to the parts of the animate body. (...) For the vegetative soul in animals is for the sake of preservation and being, and apart from it the part for perception could not be. (*DA* 75.24-76.1, transl. Caston)

Even if the nutritive soul’s powers satisfy the second condition, they do not satisfy the first. Alexander concedes that some living beings may not have a reproductive power, but this is visibly only the result of

---

<sup>63</sup> *DA* 30.5-6.

<sup>64</sup> *DA* 8.11-13.

<sup>65</sup> *Pace* Bergeron & Dufour (2008), 36.

<sup>66</sup> *DA* 29.16-17.

<sup>67</sup> *DA* 35.17-22.

<sup>68</sup> *DA* 36.13-15.

<sup>69</sup> *In Met.* 263.32-33. Concerning textual issues and the translation of this passage, I refer the reader to Guyomarc’h (2015), 225.

<sup>70</sup> See also *DA* 75.31-76.6; Caston (2012), 121. On the nutritive part in the teleological order, see 28.20-25; 94.11-17.

a particular accident (*i.e.* sterility), in accordance with the physical regularities ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ.<sup>71</sup> Alexander makes similar remarks when he goes over the development of the rational power in men “who are not mutilated”.<sup>72</sup> It is because plants in general possess the power of reproduction as well as the power of nutrition, that reproductive power is “part of the power and soul for nourishing [oneself]”.<sup>73</sup> If Alexander does admit that there is a serial order within sensitive power<sup>74</sup>, he never claims there is such an order in the case of vegetative power.

But if the unity of the vegetative soul’s power is not serial, what is it? Alexander offers some indications about this, shortly before T.6, when he discusses the distinction between the different souls or soul parts in the proper sense.

T.7. These powers differ from each other not only in definition, but can at this stage be separated by underlying subject and activity as well. For there is a difference between them in definition, because what it is to be the part for nourishing and what it is to be the part for perceiving are not the same, since in so far as they are such the definition of each is different. There is a difference in activity, because it is not the case that the part for perceiving is always active when the part for nourishing is. For the part for nourishing is always active, whereas the part for perceiving is inactive when we are asleep. And there is a difference in their underlying subject because the part for nourishing is in every part [of the body], while the part for perceiving is not, and the part for nourishing is in plants as well, while the part for perceiving is not to be found there any longer. (*DA* 75.2-10, transl. Caston)

This passage is found in a long discussion of soul parts, starting from the study of the impulsive part. Namely, it concerns the difference between the vegetative and sensitive souls. This entire discussion shows that there is an objective difference between souls and that this difference is not a mere *façon de parler*. Immediately before T.7, Alexander reminds the reader of the following: that the vegetative and sensitive parts are not found in the same beings; that the vegetative part is present at the start of the embryo’s life; that we are continually active where the vegetative part is concerned, but that we do not perceive while sleeping; that the vegetative part is productive whereas the sensitive part is theoretical; and, finally, that all parts of an animal have a share in the vegetative part, while it is obvious that we could not perceive using hair, nails or bones.

Then (at T.7) Alexander summarizes his claims with three criteria that will be also applied next to the difference between nutritive soul and impulsive soul, and to the one between sensitive soul and impulsive soul: in definition, in activity, in their underlying subject. The first proposition of the passage (*i.e.* that the difference between the soul parts cannot simply amount to a difference in definition) is interesting, since Alexander uses it in other occasions, for instance in the cases of φαντασία: Alexander refuses to make imagination a proper part of the soul precisely because it differs from sensation *only* in being or in definition, but not in its underlying subject.<sup>75</sup> In this passage, “underlying subject” refers to the traces left in the soul by sensible objects, but it can also refer to the corporeal organs the soul depends on. In this case, the extensional difference (some animals do not have φαντασία) is not the sign of a difference that could ground a soul part in the proper sense.

---

<sup>71</sup> *DA* 35.19-20; Caston (2012), 132.

<sup>72</sup> *DA* 82.12, using the same words in 35.20.

<sup>73</sup> *DA* 32.21-22.

<sup>74</sup> *Quaestio* 2.27.

<sup>75</sup> *DA* 69.5-6.

Likewise, the three powers within the vegetative soul do not meet the three criteria and, thus, are not different parts of an animal's soul. Reproduction, growth and nutrition differ, at least partially, in being or in definition. They also differ in activity (as the temporal criterion signals). But they do not differ sufficiently in their underlying subject, since their operations have some organs in common as well as an object (food) which, while different as *qua*-object, is identical as extensional object.<sup>76</sup> Hence, in an animal, they are not soul parts in the proper sense and can be unified in the vegetative soul.

I have mentioned that the vegetative soul's three powers differ at least partially in definition: with this, Alexander draws a subtle distinction, which leads to a more positive approach of the powers' unification. When Alexander summarizes the three criteria, he retains only one. It is not the criterion of underlying subject, but the one of definition. The sensitive and rational parts are different from the others on account of being *κριτικὰ*, "for cognition"; the impulsive part is practical; the vegetative part is productive (*ποιητικόν*).<sup>77</sup> I will not discuss here the obvious systematization created by this distinction, which borrows the division of the sciences to apply it to the partition of the soul.<sup>78</sup> More important for us is the reference to an end, which encompasses the criteria previously listed. The priority of the end has been made explicit before, in a passage already cited at T.6: "For the vegetative soul in animals is for the sake of preservation and being, and apart from it the part for perception could not be." Of the three criteria – definition, activity and underlying subject – the first, because it refers to an end, is the most crucial and the one which determines the following criteria.

As we have seen, the vegetative soul's powers can be distinguished according to their *σκοπός*, *i.e.* according to what for the sake of which they are. But this distinction must not conceal a superior unity: the three powers have in common to be for the sake of life itself<sup>79</sup>. This is why Alexander also calls the vegetative soul, the "vital" soul (*ζωτική*).<sup>80</sup> Each of the vegetative soul's three powers involves life. Nutrition is the condition of life itself and, without it, there is no ensouled being. The need to nourish oneself is the first element that defines life.<sup>81</sup> Its function of "preservation" (of life or of being<sup>82</sup>) is often extended to the entire vegetative soul. Growth, on the other hand, generates an "increase in size", that is also part of the definition of life.<sup>83</sup> Finally, the reproductive capacity is a general feature of all living beings.<sup>84</sup> Even if Alexander often discusses it separately from the two other vegetative powers, it is an end for every living

---

<sup>76</sup> For the seed as "the end product of the final stage of nourishment", see *DA* 36.4 and 92.20-21 (Aristotle, *inter alia*, *GA* 1.18, 725a11-13).

<sup>77</sup> *DA* 75.12-13.

<sup>78</sup> Alexander is, concerning the parts of the soul, as flexible as Aristotle is concerning the different sciences. The latter occasionally divides the sciences only between theoretical ones and practical, or productive ones, and the former, likewise, sometimes puts the nutritive soul together with the practical part, cf. *DA* 99.21-22; cf. also 75.14-15 on the impulsive part as both "productive and practical"; 73.22-23 and 99.18 on the mere bipartition of the soul into critical and practical parts.

<sup>79</sup> *DA* 75.31.

<sup>80</sup> *DA* 38.12-13.

<sup>81</sup> *DA* 29.3-10; 31.9; 78.5-6; 92.18.

<sup>82</sup> Which are the same thing. On this, see Aristotle, *DA* 2.4, 415b13.

<sup>83</sup> *DA* 29.10; 31.9; 35.16-17; 78.5-6; 92.18.

<sup>84</sup> *DA* 32.11-20.

being *qua* living being.<sup>85</sup> But, differently from the two other vegetative powers, it does not cause solely the preservation or the development (σωτηρίαν τε καὶ τελείωσιν) of living beings. Rather it brings completion and “a share in immortality”<sup>86</sup> in a living being who is already developed. This triple function – to produce, develop and reproduce life – suffices to indicate the vegetative powers’ unity. It provides support to the empirical fact that all non-mutilated living beings must possess all three of them.<sup>87</sup>

As a result, the teleological criterion is adaptable enough to account both for the soul powers’ difference and for their unity, depending on the focus of analysis. This model can bring to mind the interconnection of instrumental ends and ends *per se* in moral conduct. Analyzed in relation with each other, in a plant, the vegetative soul’s powers are different, because each of them, in their own way, contributes to the plant’s life. Analyzed in a more complex lifeform, like an animal, they serve one common end, and are therefore united into the same part of the soul.

But this teleological schema subordinating means and ends is not as systematic as it seems. For, rigorously, in line with Alexander’s view of serial unity, we would be justified to expect the vegetative soul to be for the sake of the sensitive soul, which follows it in the order of souls. Yet that is not the case: for Alexander, the vegetative soul simply produces life as the condition of possibility of sensation. By contrast, the teleological criterion applies more directly to the relation between sensation and impulsion: the discrimination of sensible objects has action for an end.<sup>88</sup> In turn, the impulsive part aims at the rational part<sup>89</sup> – which opens way to an intellectualist reading of the *De anima*. But this is another story to tell.

## 5. The parts of the form

In conclusion, I want to take a step back and consider the unity of the vegetative soul and the distinction of its powers from another angle. In a short passage of his commentary to *Metaphysics* Δ 25, concerning the meaning of “part”<sup>90</sup>, Alexander mentions the “parts of the form”:

T.8. ‘Or the form’ again indicates the division [of a thing] as form. For there are parts of the form as form, for instance as the powers of the soul, which is a form, are parts into which the soul is divided. (Alexander, *In Met.* 424.28-31, transl. Dooley)

Chapter 25 follows the possible objects of the division, which produces distinct types of parts. The development at T.8 is found in what Alexander identifies as the fourth sense of “part”: in the case of the hylomorphic compound, x is a part of y if y is divided into x, or if y is composed of x’s. Aristotle gives a number of examples of the partition of hylomorphic compounds<sup>91</sup> and Alexander, here, comments on what

<sup>85</sup> DA 35.22-23.

<sup>86</sup> DA 36.5-9; 92.19-20.

<sup>87</sup> Alexander does not appear hindered by the plurivocity of life. See Accattino and Donini (1996), 263 and Caston (2012), 122-123.

<sup>88</sup> See also *Mantissa* §1, 105.29-30.

<sup>89</sup> See mainly DA 76.1-16.

<sup>90</sup> V. Caston has already pointed out the relevance of this passage for the interpretation of *De anima* 31.2-6 (Caston (2012), 126, n. 275).

<sup>91</sup> Alexandre is commenting 1023b20 “τὸ ὅλον ἢ τὸ εἶδος ἢ τὸ ἔχον εἶδος”. With Bonitz’s punctuation (“τὸ ὅλον, ἢ τὸ εἶδος ἢ τὸ ἔχον εἶδος”), “whole” is a general term covering two cases: form itself and whatever possesses a form. For Alexander, there are three distinct cases.

is for him the second of these examples, the one of form “as form” (which probably refers to form taken in itself, in opposition to form taken in some matter).

The idea that the parts of the soul are “parts of the form” is of course not Alexander’s invention.<sup>92</sup> But, in the rest of the Aristotelian corpus, the phrase “parts of the form” is logical, and is usually understood as an ellipsis of the more complete phrase “parts of the account of the form”, *i.e.* of the definition.<sup>93</sup> Alexander is well aware of this usage, as the rest of his commentary to  $\Delta$  25 shows. But he makes a clear distinction between the logical usage and the one he has here in mind: the parts of the definition mentioned at the end of  $\Delta$  25 are indeed parts, but they are, Alexander says, “παρὰ τὰ τοῦ εἴδους μέρη”<sup>94</sup>, distinct of the parts of the form. The definition is formulated in connection to the form, but also includes the matter, here, the genus. There is then a difference between the parts of the form in a logical sense and the ‘physical’ parts of form as form.

From this point on, the problem unfolds predictably: if form is, in the wording Alexander often uses, the cause of being and thus of unity for any substance<sup>95</sup>, it seems risky to no longer think of the form as a mereological atom, *i.e.* as a fundamentally simple and indivisible thing. If indeed the form has parts, what is the glue that holds them together? There are two likely solutions: either form is the combination of its own parts, that is, in the case of the soul, a mere bundle of powers; or soul is the cause of the unity of its parts, in such a way that this cause is distinct from these parts. In this latter case, given that Alexander lays much more emphasis on power than on activity in the definition of the soul, the soul itself would be a power possessing various powers.

But, following what we have said above, it seems to me that Alexander leans towards the former case. The soul’s unity is – if I can put it this way – self-sufficient: the unification of the parts of the soul does not require a cause other than the teleological schema which structures the embedding of means and ends. The soul is not a mysterious fastening, an additional “yoke” (to recall the meaning of the verb “συνέζευκται”) that would unify from above its different powers or parts.

This is how we must understand Philoponus’ testimony on Alexander. According to Philoponus, Alexander claimed that the soul is not the principle of its different powers, but the principle of the activities resulting from these powers. This amounts to say that the psychic form is only the combination of its powers.

T.9. Those who want to make all soul immortal say that that which nourishes (τὸ μὲν θρεπτικόν), that which augments and the like are activities of soul which, they say, Aristotle too says are inseparable, but the soul and the powers from which these activities proceed (προέρχονται), these are separable. They claim, then, that he says, that the soul is cause and source (ἰτίαν καὶ ἀρχήν) of these activities, the nourishing, the perceiving and the rest. But that Aristotle does not think this has been stated many times. Alexander interprets in a more natural and true way [when he says] that the soul is source and cause of nourishing (τρέφεισθαι), augmenting and perceiving, which are in reality (τῷ ὄντι) activities of soul. But that he [Aristotle] does not say the soul is the source of that which nourishes and perceives (ἀρχήν τοῦ θρεπτικοῦ καὶ αἰσθητικοῦ) he has made clear by his adding that it ‘is defined by these, that which nourishes, that which

<sup>92</sup> He could have taken it, for instance, from *Metaph.* Z 10, 1035b14-21.

<sup>93</sup> See the next passage at  $\Delta$  25, 1023b23-25; see also, among other passages, Z 10, 1035a4 and 21.

<sup>94</sup> *In Met.* 425.1.

<sup>95</sup> For instance, *DA* 15.28-29; *In Met.* 373.25; 375.10-11, etc. For being and unity, see *e.g.* *In Met.* 249.5-14. On this claim, see also Rashed (2007), especially p. 31, and Guyomarc’h (2015), 256-265.



perceives' and the rest – [‘defined by these’] in place of ‘the soul is given its boundaries in these, and has its being in these’. (Philoponus, *In De anima*, 237.11-23 transl. Charlton)

This passage is a commentary on *De anima* 2.2, 413b11-13: “Νῦν δὲ τοσοῦτον εἰρήσθω μόνον, ὅτι ἐστὶν ἡ ψυχὴ πάντων τῶν εἰρημένων ἀρχὴ καὶ τούτοις ὠρίσται, θρεπτικῶ, αἰσθητικῶ, διανοητικῶ, κινήσει” (in Philoponus’ text<sup>96</sup>). In Aristotle, this sentence is found just before the consideration whether the nutritive, sensitive and dianoetic powers are a soul of their own or a soul part and, if they are a part, whether they are separated in account or in place. According to Philoponus, two readings of the 413b11-13 passage have been offered. These two readings result from the ambiguity of two clauses: “πάντων τῶν εἰρημένων”, on the one hand, and the enumeration “θρεπτικῶ, αἰσθητικῶ, διανοητικῶ, κινήσει”, on the other hand.

In the first reading, the two clauses refer to the activities that are inseparable from the body, in opposition to the soul and its powers, which can be separated from the body. The obvious goal of this distinction is to preserve the immortality of the soul. As I. Kupreeva has shown, this position is the one of Numenius, whom Philoponus has already named in the proem of his commentary. For Numenius, the entire soul can be separated from the body, including the irrational soul and the nutritive soul. In the later tradition, this claim has been understood to endorse the immortality of the whole soul.<sup>97</sup>

The second reading is Alexander’s, for whom the soul is the principle of its activities. In talking about these activities, Alexander uses the infinitive: τρέφεισθαι, αὔξεισθαι, αἰσθάνεισθαι, which are “all the things that have been said”. Accordingly, “πάντων τῶν εἰρημένων” does not refer to the same thing as the following enumeration (“θρεπτικῶ, αἰσθητικῶ...”), which is (correctly) interpreted by Alexander as a list of soul powers. The soul is not a “principle” of its parts or of its powers, because it is nothing else than these powers, since the soul “has its being in these”. The soul is identical in definition with its powers.

Any soul, because it is necessarily a complex form, is then clearly a cluster of powers objectively distinct but unified by their common end: life for plants, sensation for non-human animals, intellect or reason for men. Hence, when Alexander says that the powers of the vegetative soul are “conjoined” (συνέζευκται, T.2), the verb is, so to speak, in the middle, rather than in the passive voice.

Gweltaz Guyomarc’h (University of Lyon)

Translated by Jeanne Allard

---

<sup>96</sup> Philoponus omits the “τούτων” which our manuscripts have after “εἰρημένων”, but this does not alter the meaning. Charlton translates: “For the present let it suffice to say only that the soul is the source of all these things that have been said and is defined by them, that which nourishes, that which perceives, that which thinks, change.”

<sup>97</sup> Philoponus, *In DA* 9.35-38 (= Numenius, fr. 47 des Places); Kupreeva (2012), 125-126.

## Bibliography

### *Aristotle:*

Shields (2016): C. Shields, *Aristotle. De anima*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

### *Alexander of Aphrodisias:*

Accattino and Donini (1996): P. Accattino and P. Donini, *Alessandro di Afrodisia, L'anima*, Roma – Bari, Biblioteca universale Laterza.

Bergeron and Dufour (2008): M. Bergeron and R. Dufour, *Alexandre d'Aphrodise, De l'âme*, Paris, Vrin.

Caston (2012): V. Caston, *Alexander of Aphrodisias, On the Soul. Part 1, Soul as Form of the Body, Parts of the Soul, Nourishment, and Perception*, London, Bristol Classical Press.

Dooley (1993): W.E. Dooley, *Alexander of Aphrodisias, On Aristotle's Metaphysics 5*, London – New-York, Duckworth – Cornell University Press.

Groisard (2013): J. Groisard, *Alexandre d'Aphrodise. Sur la mixtion et la croissance (De mixtione)*, Paris, Belles Lettres.

Sharples (2004): R.W. Sharples, *Alexander of Aphrodisias, Supplement to On the soul*, New-York, Cornell University Press.

Todd (1976): R.B. Todd, *Alexander of Aphrodisias on Stoic Physics. A Study of the De Mixtione with preliminary essays, text, and commentary*, Leiden, Brill.

### *Philoponus:*

Charlton (2005): W. Charlton, *Philoponus. On Aristotle On the Soul 2.1-6*, London – New-York, Duckworth – Cornell University Press.

### *Secondary literature:*

Accattino (1995): P. Accattino, "Generazione dell'anima in Alessandro di Afrodisia *De anima* 2.10-11.13?", in: *Phronesis*, 40, 2, 182-201.

Annas and Barnes (1985): J. Annas and J. Barnes, *The Modes of Scepticism: Ancient Texts and Modern Interpretations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Corcilius and Gregorić (2010): K. Corcilius and P. Gregorić, "Separability vs. difference: parts and capacities of the soul in Aristotle", in: *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, xxxix, 81-119.

Gregorić (2007): P. Gregorić, *Aristotle on the Common Sense*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Guyomarc'h (2015): G. Guyomarc'h, *L'Unité de la métaphysique selon Alexandre d'Aphrodise*, Paris, Vrin.

Hangai (2017): A. Hangai, "Alexander of Aphrodisias on *Phantasia*: An Aristotelian account of mental representation in 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE", Ph.D. Dissertation, Central European University, Hungary.

- Hintikka (1974): J. Hintikka, "Knowledge and its objects in Plato", in: J. Hintikka, *Knowledge and the Known: Historical Perspectives in Epistemology*, Dordrecht, Reidel, 1-30.
- Inwood (1985): B. Inwood, *Ethics and Human Action in Early Stoicism*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- Inwood (2014): B. Inwood, "Walking and Talking: Reflections on Divisions of the Soul in Stoicism", in: K. Corcilius and D. Perler, *Partitioning the Soul. Debates from Plato to Leibniz*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 63-83.
- Johansen (2012): T.K. Johansen, *The Powers of Aristotle's Soul*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Kupreeva (2012): I. Kupreeva, "Alexander of Aphrodisias and Aristotle's *De anima*: what's in a commentary?", in: *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 55, 1, 109-129.
- Lefebvre (2003): D. Lefebvre, "Comment bien définir une puissance ? Sur la notion de puissance des contraires en *Métaphysique Thèta 2*", in: *Philosophie Antique*, 3, 117-139.
- Menn (2002): S. Menn, "Aristotle's Definition of Soul and the Programme of the *De anima*", in: *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, xxii, 83-139.
- Polansky (2007): R. Polansky, *Aristotle's De anima*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Rashed (2007): M. Rashed, *Essentialisme. Alexandre d'Aphrodise entre logique, physique et cosmologie*, Berlin, De Gruyter.
- Tieleman (1996): T. Tieleman, *Galen and Chrysippus on the Soul: Argument and Refutation in the de Placitis Books II – III*, Leiden – Boston, Brill.